

**Secretary Jason Kander: Remarks for the Opening of the 98th General Assembly
January 7th, 2015**

I'm happy to join in welcoming you to the first day of Missouri's 98th General Assembly. I congratulate you all for running successful campaigns that have sent you here to represent your communities.

A special welcome to those staff members who are new to us this session—my advice: work hard, learn everything you can, and work on forming friendships. You'll be amazed how far that will take you. And to the many returning staff members who are responsible for the inner workings of this great legislative body, whose work enables the legislative branch of Missouri's state government to function and thrive—please join me in thanking them for their continued service.

To the many family members, friends and supporters of these newly elected legislators, thank you for your hard work in getting these folks elected. Whether it was pep talks, pots of chili, paper cuts from big mailings, door knocks, phone calls or parades, these legislators sitting here on this floor could not be here without your help. We all want to say thank you.

Welcome to the activists and advocates who stand up for what they believe in, and who join us to fight for shared priorities. Your dedication and commitment is inspiring.

Finally, welcome to our friends and colleagues in the press. You have the honorable—and difficult—mission of telling the story of what will happen within these walls over the coming months. Thank you for your service and diligence in informing Missourians about the deliberations and decisions of their elected leaders.

If I had to guess, from my own experience, I'd bet some of the new members are brimming with excitement and nervousness sitting here today. It's a little like your first day as a freshman in high school, isn't it? Perhaps you're wondering who you'll eat lunch with, or where the bathrooms are. Many of you are probably wondering how you'll work day in and day out in that large closet they keep telling you is your office—trust me, you'll figure it all out, and you'll love it.

Still, one of the biggest questions that nags at all of us and drives us to do better—no matter if this is your first term or your last, is a big one: **How can I make a difference now that I'm here?**

I don't care what party or district you represent, or whether you're a freshman or old hand—we all came here to help people, and the question of how we make a difference is fundamental to the work of this body.

Forget all that talk about parties, gossip and who-dislikes-whom. **This is the real question**, “How can I make a difference while I'm here?”

Think about this. Most of you have already made big differences in your communities. Differences that really meant something to your constituents, and that most likely provided good reason for sending you here today. The trick is to never forget what matters to those constituents, and what is in the best interest of Missourians.

And to those of you freshmen out there—yes, you can definitely make a difference, even when you're new and feel like you might not have that much clout. You don't have to be a standard-bearer or powerful senior member of your caucus to get something done. But that's also an important reminder – something to think about – for those returning legislators and staff who already know the ropes. It's easy to get wrapped up in committees, hearings, negotiations and even party politics. But at the end of the day, it's on each and every one of us to make something happen. To make Missouri a better place for all of us.

Ninety-four years ago, a Republican freshman state representative from St. Louis' sixth district sat on this floor at the beginning of the 51st General Assembly, and most likely pondered the same question of how best to navigate this new landscape and make a difference.

On that January day in 1921, Walthall Moore became the first African-American to serve as a Missouri state representative. Representative Moore's pioneering victory in a predominantly white district wasn't a fluke, it wasn't just luck. After growing up in Alabama, he completed his secondary education in St. Louis' public schools, and went on to attend Howard University in Washington, DC—one of the nation's preeminent historically black universities.

Representative Moore returned to St. Louis after his time at Howard and started the city's first steam laundry business owned by an African-American. It was only after his success in business that he decided to run for office, to serve his community in another way.

Some could say breaking the racial barrier in our general assembly would have been enough to make a difference for future generations of Missourians—and it certainly did—but Representative Moore was on a mission.

He arrived in Jefferson City dedicated to improving the lives of black Missourians by increasing their access to higher education.

From his time at Howard University, Representative Moore understood the need for quality higher education, and believed that if he couldn't desegregate public education, then the government at the very least had to hold up the "equal" part of its misguided "separate but equal" policy. If schools were to be kept separate, then the facilities had to be equal according to the law and Representative Moore knew that couldn't happen without action.

You see, it was Representative Walthall Moore—as a freshman member of the General Assembly—who authored and successfully carried the legislation that turned “Lincoln Institute” – a teacher training school for African-Americans – into Lincoln University.

This change was significant: as an “institute” Lincoln received minimal state funding, and had very poor facilities—far inferior to those of any white school in the state. But when Governor Hyde signed the bill upgrading Lincoln Institute to a university, Lincoln became eligible for a much larger appropriation.

In spite of his amazing first-term legislative achievement, Representative Moore didn’t have an easy path to a second term. It was a redistricting year and, unsurprisingly, the only African-American member of the House found himself drawn into a district very different from the one that had elected him. He lost re-election and, I’m sure, most of his colleagues thought they had heard the last of him. But Representative Moore didn’t give up.

He had unfinished work here in Jefferson City and two years later, he came back, this time in the new 3rd district. Over the course of three more terms as a State Representative, he continued to fight to make sure Lincoln University received appropriations large enough to provide equal education and facilities to black students.

Representative Moore passed away in 1960, but not before he saw Lincoln University become the Midwest’s premiere institution of higher education for African-Americans.

Representative Moore’s story reminds us why we’re here and shows us just how much potential we have to make a difference in our state and communities. Yes, there are obstacles and yes, there is gamesmanship. But the fact is, **whatever it is you care about, whatever it is that inspired you to run for office—work toward that goal.** Let’s face it, it’s unlikely the odds against you are any tougher than what Representative Moore faced in 1921 when he sat where you sit today.

If one freshman representative could not only break this body’s antiquated racial barriers, but sponsor legislation to transform higher education for African Americans in Missouri, just imagine what each of us here can do during this 98th General Assembly.

I promise you, that if you can find that guiding objective—*your* mission, *your* Lincoln University, you’ll be able to withstand the gamesmanship, the frustrations, and the challenges that sometimes come with legislative service. Because each day, you’ll wake up knowing that you have an opportunity to advance your vision for positive change just a little bit closer to becoming a reality. That sense of mission will protect you and your reason for being here from the day-to-day political pressures that come from every possible angle.

So let Representative Moore’s story be a challenge and reminder to all of us. That we don’t have to settle for the status quo, or accept what we’re told with no questions asked. Ask those questions, push those envelopes.

We're all here to make Missouri better, and the clock is ticking.

So I thank you for your time today. And I look forward to working with you to make a difference in the lives of Missourians. Let's get to work.